



ACANTHORHYNCHUS TENUIROSTRIS.

ACANTHORHYNCHUS TENUIROSTRIS.

Slender-billed Spine-bill.

Certhia tenuirostris, Lath. Ind. Orn. Suppl., p. xxxvi.

Le Cap noir, Vieill. Ois. Dor., tom. ii. p. 94. pl. 60.

Slender-billed Honey-eater, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. iv. p. 194. pl. lxii.

Flapping Honey-eater, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. iv. p. 195.

Hooded Creeper, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. viii. p. 109.

Slender-billed Creeper, Lath. Gen. Syn. Suppl., vol. ii. p. 165. pl. 129.

Meliphaga tenuirostris, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 317.

Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris, Gould, Syn. Birds of Australia, Part II.

————— *dubius*? Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 25; and in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part II.

Cobbler's Awl, Colonists of Van Diemen's Land.

Spine-bill, Colonists of New South Wales.

ON referring to the above list of synonyms, it will be seen that I formerly entertained an opinion that there were two species of this genus very nearly allied to each other, the one a native of Van Diemen's Land, and the other of the continent of Australia; the former being distinguished from the latter by its smaller size in all its admeasurements, by the crescent-shaped markings of the neck, and by the brown of the abdomen being much deeper in colour; I am now, however, inclined to believe that they are identical; but as no conclusive evidence that such is the case has yet been obtained, I must leave the matter still doubtful until further research shall enable us to decide the question. In habits, disposition and nidification the two birds closely assimilate, as I had abundant opportunities of observing during my residence in the colonies.

There is no member of the large family of Honey-eaters to which it belongs that enjoys a structure more especially adapted for the purposes of its existence than the present species, whose fine and extremely delicate bill is peculiarly suited for the extraction of insects and honey from the inmost recesses of the tubular flowers which abound in many parts of Australia, particularly of the various species of *Epacris*, a tribe of plants closely allied to the Heaths (*Erica*) of Africa and Europe, which when in bloom are always frequented by numbers of these birds, so much so indeed that it would seem as if the one was expressly designed for the other, the flowers for the birds and *vice versâ*; those who have traversed the immense beds of *Epacris impressa*, so abundant in Van Diemen's Land, must have often observed the bird darting out from beneath his feet and flitting off to a very short distance, descending again to the thickest parts of the beds. It also frequents the wattles and gums during their flowering-season, and appears to be attracted to their blossoms quite as much for the insects as for the nectar, the stomachs of all those dissected containing the remains of coleoptera and other insects. It is rather shy in disposition except when closely engaged in procuring food, when it may be approached within a yard or two.

Its flight is extremely quick and darting and performed with a zigzag motion; and its note, which is a monotonous shriek, is somewhat loud for so small a bird. Should the bird to which I have given the name of *dubius* prove to be merely a local variety, this species will be found to range over a wide extent of country, including Van Diemen's Land, all the islands in Bass's Straits, and the continent of Australia from South Australia to Moreton Bay; to the eastward of the former, or to the eastward and northward of the latter country, I have never been able to trace it.

The nest of this species is a small cup-shaped and rather beautiful structure, although not so compact or neatly formed as that of many other birds; those I found, both in Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales, were built on some low shrubs a few feet from the ground, mostly in a species of *Leptospermum*; it is outwardly constructed of moss and grasses, and lined with feathers; the eggs are two in number, of a delicate buffy white, increasing in depth of colour towards the larger end; in some instances I have found them marked with a zone of reddish chestnut spots shaded with indistinct markings of grey, intermingled with very minute ink-like dots; in form the eggs are much lengthened and pointed; their medium length is nine lines and breadth six lines.

Crown of the head shining greenish black; space between the bill and the eye, ear-coverts, lunated band on the sides of the chest, primaries, and six middle tail-feathers black; the remainder of the tail-feathers black largely tipped with white, and slightly margined on the external web with brown; back of the neck rufous chestnut, passing into chestnut-brown on the upper part of the back; secondaries, greater wing-coverts, rump and upper tail-coverts grey; throat, cheeks and chest white, the first with a patch of chestnut-brown in the centre, deepening into black on its lower edge; abdomen, flanks and under tail-coverts light chestnut-brown; irides scarlet; bill black; feet reddish brown.

Specimens from Van Diemen's Land have the patch in the centre of the throat and the lunated marks on the sides of the neck much deeper and the whole of the under surface richer chestnut.

The figures are those of a male and female, on a branch of what is considered a white variety of *Epacris impressa*.